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## Settling into 'unhomeliness': Displacement in selected Caribbean and Caribbean Canadian women's writing

### Abstract

Faced with horrific daily evidence of the consequences of polarisation on the 'grounds' of difference (racial, ethnic, religious), I find myself increasingly emphasising culture contact and transculturation in my teaching practice. This is a reasonable enough focus in the Caribbean context, and it certainly is appropriate to my history as a product of such processes: my parents were born in two different countries, I was born in a third, brought up in a fourth and live and work in yet another; my children were born in one country, of parents born in two other countries, and they too will very likely end up living and working somewhere else; and so the cycle continues.

EVELYN O'CALLAGHAN

## Settling into 'Unhomeliness': Displacement in Selected Caribbean and Caribbean Canadian Women's Writing

Faced with horrific daily evidence of the consequences of polarisation on the 'grounds' of difference (racial, ethnic, religious), I find myself increasingly emphasising culture contact and transculturation in my teaching practice. This is a reasonable enough focus in the Caribbean context, and it certainly is appropriate to my history as a product of such processes: my parents were born in two different countries, I was born in a third, brought up in a fourth and live and work in yet another; my children were born in one country, of parents born in two other countries, and they too will very likely end up living and working somewhere else; and so the cycle continues. Hence I am drawn to texts which feature migration journeys and the interculturalisation, painfully or positively depicted, which follows.

There is no shortage of this kind of writing: indeed Homi Bhabha has commented on 'the deep stirring of the "unhomely"' in current fiction (141). For him, the migration experience — that 'estranging sense of relocation of the home' (141) — is the paradigmatic post-colonial experience; and given its genesis in the history of migration, the (forced or voluntary) movement and contact of peoples and cultures has been a constant in the story which the Caribbean tells about itself. However, this is an open-ended story, for as Stuart Hall reminds us, the migration journey — then as now — was a two-way affair. Over the course of centuries of contact, conflict and creolisation amongst imported peoples, the Caribbean began to export a new set of cultural and racial 'products'. So in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example Caribbean whites who travelled 'back' to the ancestral homeland discovered that they were no longer expatriate Europeans but something else: Barbadians or Jamaicans or Antiguan, or more generally, West Indian Creoles (Watson 30).

The exportation of peoples and cultures, then, as well as their importation, is inherent in the construction of Caribbean identity, so that in the former imperial centre (Britain) as well as in what many term the new imperial centre (North America), Caribbean peoples have established their presence, politely — or not so politely — but insistently. West Indians in London or Toronto or New York are acknowledged, recognised, even granted 'nuff respect'. But are they 'at home', and if so, what constitutes this state? Again, one can look to the texts of migrant/

diaspora writers for answers. How does their work configure what Bhabha calls 'the unhomely moment', that post-colonial condition of 'not at homeness' in the old world that is their new home?

For anyone familiar with Caribbean literature of migration, particularly the account of the colonial journey 'back' to the 'Mother Country', the texts that come to mind first might include George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), followed by those by V.S. Naipaul, Austin Clarke, Andrew Salkey, Cecil Foster and Caryl Phillips. No shortage of twentieth-century perspectives on the migration-to-centre experience then, but virtually all by men. What about texts in which women wrote the journey? How did women from the West Indies conceive of home in the new, 'unhomely' space of the metropole? In this preliminary exploration, I will focus on some of the ways in which selected women's narratives detail the migration experience, its traumas and its pleasures, and how they address the complex issues of transculturation, belonging and identity. I'll start with two earlier accounts that deal with the English metropole, then move across time and space to consider several women writers' construction of the North American 'home'.

#### FRIEDA CASSIN: THE 'TAINTED' CREOLE

As Watson observes, white West Indian creoles became most aware of their distance from 'their ancestral Europe' in Europe itself, and many of their narratives speak of a deep longing for the Caribbean home. Within this early version of the Caribbean diaspora, then, white creoles saw themselves as different in many ways from the Europeans from whom they derived ancestry, and to the British, they certainly were strikingly different. However, much as they insisted upon their whiteness, or attempted to assimilate the knowledge and manners of the Mother Country, creoles never quite made it in British eyes, either at home or abroad. Frieda Cassin's *With Silent Tread; A West Indian Novel* (c. 1890) is a case in point.

The plot deals with the lives of those infrequently mentioned in nineteenth-century histories of the region, 'the lady-kind of the island' (Cassin 77), as viewed by themselves and by their English counterparts. The two perspectives differ radically. Marion, a young English woman, travels to the West Indies to spend time with relatives, and becomes very fond of her fun-loving creole cousin, Morea, who is all colour, flying dark hair, with a 'saucy, laughing face' and an affectionate and open nature (25). If she displays rather too much of the imperious creole in shouting for her old nurse, she counters this by expressions of fierce devotion: 'I love her with all my heart ... she is a most important member of the family' (29). Above all, Morea is described as childlike and displays a child's passionate attachment to, her beautiful tropical landscape (110). By contrast, Marion is throughout constructed as ideally feminine, but sensible and rational. Cassin's description is of an 'unmistakably English' young lady. Decorously attired in 'a

quiet suit of navy serge', she is 'a woman who, one instinctively felt, would have a wholesome influence over all with whom she came in touch' (13). The clear distinction between the sensibilities of the two young women, foreshadows the clash of metropolitan and colonial cultures and values which is the subtext of Cassin's narrative.

What I want to focus on here is the British distrust of the West Indian creole, which largely accounts for the unease, the 'not-at-homeness' of the white creole who makes the journey 'back' to the 'Mother Country'. Why the distrust? White creoles in the Caribbean diaspora were viewed with suspicion because of their rather too easy association with their black compatriot, or put more bluntly, the possible taint of the 'tarbrush'. Miscegenation as the shameful evidence of secret racial contamination, is a pervasive theme in constructions of the West Indies well into the twentieth century. In Cassin's text, it is symbolised by the trope of latent leprosy, passed from black to white. The novel suggests that this hidden taint, this potential corruption of blood and bloodlines, infects any long-term congress between white creole and British.

When Morea travels abroad, she refers to 'going home to England' (106), but on arrival meets with English prescriptions of herself as a stereotypical creole, a different creature. The English Selwyn expects the Antiguan Morea to be short and yellow, 'utterly incapable of helping herself' without 'six or seven black maids lolling about', indolent, drawling and fond of giving orders (116). As far as he is concerned, she comes from a 'topsy-turvey land' (125) where English norms do not apply. Morea 'refuses to fit into that niche' (119). She continually compares West Indian and English customs, to the detriment of the latter, and takes pleasure (like Kincaid's Lucy) in comparing the 'sun at home' with its English equivalent, a 'poor watery thing' (121). She insists she will continue to love her West Indian friends, including her black nurse, 'quite as much as anybody in this muddy England' (137), and even mocks pre-constructed notions of English manhood (120). 'You are sadly in need of a little travel to enlarge your mind' (125), she advises Selwyn, neatly turning the tables on the superior Englishman (to whom, of course, she is soon engaged to be married).

However, Morea's kind of romantic passion does not suit a temperate English social climate. Selwyn's practical older sister restores the voice of reason: 'It's so utterly absurd, it must *not* be allowed', Elizabeth decides, aware of the folly of attempting to unite the worlds of the romantic (childish, uncivilised, tainted) creole woman and the English man destined for a sober future as a responsible doctor. Elizabeth is proved right. Days before the wedding, Morea's features indicate something is amiss: 'inflamed nostrils and swollen lips and a generally bloated and dissipated appearance' (144). Her illness, as implied by these racialised symptoms, is a creole malady. In sickness, as in health, the discursive category which she shares with blacks in the Caribbean, set her apart from her English intended. Finally, an English medical specialist reveals the truth: 'the

bride-elect is a leper' (149). Morea disappears, a 'veiled hooded figure' whisked away by the doctor at her own request, to a place 'where I can do no harm to anyone, least of all to those I love' (152).

Morea, the best that West Indian creole culture has produced, is tainted, and the taint is contagious. The loss of his child-bride eventually turns Selwyn into a more responsible adult: 'he grew graver and quieter' (154). It is as if the frivolous West Indian creole influence has been, as it must be, exchanged for a more suitable (if stereotypical) English sobriety. Three years later Selwyn proposes to the English Marion, a much safer choice in the circumstances. As in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the implication is that the contaminated creole wife must die before the English hero is able to make the more sensible marriage to one of his own kind. The white creole remains undeniably 'Other' to those at home in England; a taboo remains on the transgression of boundaries between West Indian and English varieties of whiteness.

Intriguingly, of all texts mentioned below, the bleakest account of migration 'back to centre' is that of the white creole. Prefiguring Rhys, Cassin's white Antiguan protagonist is rejected by the 'Mother Country' more absolutely than the brown Mary Seacole, the author of *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* (1857). While for the white creole, the journey 'home' to the centre proves to be a voyage of alienation, isolation and death, the brown Seacole represents the migration journey as one of self-fulfilment not possible in the more limited Jamaican home space.

#### MARY SEACOLE: EXPLOITING DISPLACEMENT

Mary Seacole's determined character is suggested at the outset of her narrative as she insists on the validity of her own voice: 'unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all' (185). Her narrative is less a comprehensive autobiography than precisely what the title proclaims: an account of wonderful adventures. Seacole was born in 1805 in Jamaica (then still a slave colony), the mixed-race daughter of a Scottish officer and a free black woman who owned and operated a successful boarding house-cum-nursing home for sick British officers. On her mother's death, Seacole managed and expanded the business and formed a lasting relationship with the British military establishment, the metropolitan arm of which would offer her certain social and economic opportunities.

She also followed in her mother's footsteps by advancing her skill as a 'doctress', and was in much demand at home and abroad during outbreaks of yellow fever, cholera and other epidemics. In addition, Seacole engaged in various business enterprises which necessitated much travelling, something she thoroughly enjoyed and indeed came to crave. She married, and was widowed soon after (the two events occur in the same paragraph in her text!). At the age of forty-five she journeyed to Central America, where she set up and ran several businesses, and then to England to offer her medical services in the Crimean

war effort. Official permission proving elusive, in 1854 she independently set up the British Hotel near Balaclava, combining the amenities of a hotel and a dispensary for the medicines she herself administered to the sick and wounded at the front. When the war ended abruptly, she had to close her operations at a loss and returned impoverished to England. In dire financial straits, she played on her reputation as Mother Seacole, minister to the troops, gaining in return recognition and gratitude and official sponsorship for her *Wonderful Adventures*, an exciting, witty, sometimes moving and often very funny account of her travels and wartime adventures. The book was a success. Honoured by the public and the military, even decorated, Seacole lived comfortably at the heart of Empire where she died in 1881.

Her West Indian affiliations are soon passed over. A brief sketch of her family, childhood and young womanhood in Jamaica takes up the first one and a half chapters and then, apart from an eight-month sojourn in the island in 1853, the entire narrative is set abroad. Sandra Pouchet Paquet observes<sup>1</sup> that for Seacole the centre is 'not located in a Jamaican social reality, but "at home" in post-Crimean England. Mary Seacole's roots may be in Jamaica, but her narrative is rooted in England' (656). Yet rather than resonating with the 'unhomely', Seacole's narrative suggests an ability to be at home in both places. At times, she longs for 'my pleasant home in Kingston' (73) and avers that 'our West Indian dishes' are a match for those of Europe's finest chef (187). On the other hand, the final section of her last chapter, titled 'Home', refers unambiguously to England. Seacole, like Morea, disingenuously elides the contradiction in claiming both: for her, to be Jamaican was also to be British. 'Home' is a shifting site, one where she can do what she does best and, like Morea in Cassin's novel, Seacole positively relishes the new for the opportunities it offers.

Seacole's race is not acknowledged as a problem: she affirms that 'I have a few shades of deeper brown upon my skin which shows me related — and I am proud of the relationship — to those poor mortals whom you once held enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns' (67), and absolutely repudiates the 'lazy creole' stereotype. Neither her gender nor her age are allowed as constraints to her positive self-promotion, as she constructs here identity as an adventurer, entrepreneur, and professional healer. Few women travel writers of the period can come close to Seacole in transgressing 'proper' female behaviour and appropriating a predominantly male vehicle for self-promotion of her heroic status. Seacole travels as 'an unprotected female' by choice — she is clear on this — through all kinds of hazardous situations. She conducts business in frontier territory, with a keen eye to profit; she manages servants, sometimes with the aid of a horsewhip (196); she attends to cholera and yellow fever cases at home and abroad, even performing a covert autopsy to find out more about the pathology of disease; she treats knife and gunshot wounds, stitches on severed ears in Central America, and braves cannon fire and musket shot to tend the wounded on the battlefields of the Crimea.

At the same time, Seacole stresses her gentle heart and feminine nurturing qualities quite as much as her aggressively adventurous nature and cold-eyed business sense. She is insistent on her motherly qualities and the soothing nature of women's hands which 'are moulded for this work' of healing (146). She is proud of her dress sense (66) and her decorum under trying conditions insisted upon, and her self-sacrificial virtues in the service of her sick or wounded 'sons' are frequently paraded: 'I love to be of service to those who need a woman's help' (78). Remarriage, domesticity, children, are of little consequence in Seacole's choice of a life of service, fame and profit. Yet for all her concern with financial advancement, Seacole insists on her status as a *lady* and her service as a motherly woman.

A proud creole Jamaican who will not tolerate racial denigration, a British subject who stresses her 'yellow' skin, she is complicatedly colonial. Her target audience is British, and the product she markets is her construction as a loyal British subject establishing herself in the 'Mother Country' and capitalising on her patriotic memoir of heroic service to the British army. For Seacole, the migration journey is an avenue to self-fulfilment — through adventure, career, fame and status, and financial gain. The West Indies, it appears, did not provide sufficient options, so she recreates herself to suit another 'home'. For her, I suggest, the 'unhomely' becomes a site for exploring subject positions rarely available to women, far less black women. Like Jamaica Kincaid's late twentieth-century novel, *Lucy*, Seacole's narrative suggests the creative potential of the migration experience.

#### JAMAICA KINCAID: AT HOME WITH THE 'UNHOMELY'

Kincaid's text also details the journey of the female migrant, but this time the new 'home' is the United States, where the young protagonist travels to work and study. Like all good colonials, Lucy already 'knows' the metropolitan environment; yet this knowledge turns out to be false. The long-desired famous buildings, important streets, spectacular bridges appear 'ordinary, dirty, worn down from so many people entering and leaving them in real life' (4). So Lucy begins to overlay this new world with the sights, sounds and smells of her West Indian island home. This is not simple immigrant nostalgia, for she has a profoundly ambivalent relationship with her motherland, yet she observes her new 'home' by filtering it through the cultural values of the old. Inevitably, the result of this multiply layered vision is continuous comparison, usually to the detriment of the United States.

Her dual consciousness is partly the result of a colonial education into imitation (of things English): as a ten-year-old girl at Queen Victoria Girl's School at the age of ten 'I was then at the height of my two-facedness ... outside, I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true' (18). However, notions of true and false, appearance and reality are in fact not so simple, for the narrator's consciousness, conditioned by an alternative Caribbean epistemological



framework is more inclusive: 'I came from a place where there was no such thing as a "real" thing, because often what seemed to be one thing turned out to be altogether different' (54). Lucy is referring here to the normal acceptance in Antigua of the paranormal — obeah, spirit possession, the appearance of the dead to the living. Highlighting the deceptive nature of appearances has the dual effect of relativising cultural practices and transcending binary oppositions inherent in Western metaphysics so that *Lucy's* 'simple' narrative underscores the relativity of truth and the constructedness of perception.

The story concerns a young West Indian girl's arrival in the metropole and her clearing of a space there where she can invent a life; but in many ways she never truly leaves the past life/place which is always carried within. Neither does Lucy ever really arrive, in the sense of achieving stasis. Far from settling on a destination she can live in/with, the narrative is a record of a restless, ongoing journey in quest of accommodation. Karen King-Aribasala makes a cogent case for reading *Lucy* as a rewriting of Columbus's voyage of discovery and conquest, as Lucy reprises Columbus's role by arriving in her new world only in order to rename, conquer and exploit. The moral corruption of the Americans, a Paradise despoiled by men from Europe, is re-enacted in the centre in the guise of a woman from the New World, who has learned the coloniser's methods very well indeed.

However, the project founders. For Lucy sickens with disgust at the perpetration of a cycle inherently poisoned by colonial discourse, 'a scene of conquered and conquests' (30), within which she too is interpellated even as she tries to reverse its terms: 'a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes' (30). The thrust of Kincaid's narrative is away from such a Manichean categorisation: Lucy refuses to be constructed as servant, but neither can she sustain the role of master. Having made a number of conquests (mainly, but not exclusively, sexual) and exploited both place and people for her own ends, Lucy comes to see that cultural contact is not necessarily synonymous with corruption, is not necessarily to be played by the master's poisoned rules.

In fact, Lucy refuses all prescribed subject positions. She is determined to evade conventional gender roles in sexual relationships, her main concern is to evade ownership: 'the moment he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way ... was the moment I grew tired of him' (155). She refuses to be a nurse, the nurturing female career mapped out for her; she refuses all that is 'expected' of her by her ladylike mother and 'polite' society. She rejects being placed, whether in terms of race or nationality, 'from the islands'. The migrant condition — being unplaced, unknown, unbelonging — is necessary for the continual self construction which preoccupies Lucy: 'I understood well that I was inventing myself' (134). In Kincaid's text then, Lucy finds the 'unhomely' moment positively empowering.

Like Seacole, Lucy comes to view her hyphenated status, the 'betweenness' of her situation between two worlds, as an asset. For her, the 'unhomely' represents

a broader canvas on which to construct her future. Like Seacole, Lucy is centrally concerned with her own interests and is quite prepared to manipulate and exploit where necessary, as she reverses Columbus's journey in quest of the fulfilment of desire. Cynically knowing about the illusory nature of metropolitan 'superiority', *Lucy* nonetheless acknowledges that this journey 'back' to the centre can be potentially empowering. The reconfiguration of Caribbean women's migration stories as difficult, but ultimately liberating transformations, takes a new twist in narratives from another north American 'centre': Canada.

**THE CANADIAN SCENE: DIONNE BRAND, SHANI MOOTOO, NALO HOPKINSON**

I conclude this survey with a few tentative remarks about the manner in which selected Caribbean-Canadian women address the issues noted in the earlier works. Do we recognise in their texts the representation of the migrant experience and the new Canadian home as a site of alienation or of potential empowerment, or indeed an amalgam of both? Of course, such a project is beset with pitfalls, for after all who constitutes 'the Caribbean-Canadian woman writer'? George Elliott Clarke's anthology, of 'African-Canadian Literature', for instance, includes writing by mixed race women who have lived most of their lives outside Canada (Olive Senior, Pamela Mordecai and Lorna Goodison), in whose work references to the new home occasionally surface, as well as by black writers such as Dionne Brand, who (like Kincaid) left the West Indies at seventeen and has been more or less resident in Canada since. Clarke himself admits the difficulty of such labels given the 'mosaic aspect of Canadian "blackness" [which] produces a palette of discourses' (xviii). The focus on Canadian 'blackness' itself presents difficulties. Writers like Brand, Claire Harris and Marlene Nourbese Philip, might be said to articulate a black nationalist perspective: as Carol Morell puts it, they all 'will assert that they speak "for" their history and "on behalf of" their people, especially women, however distant in time or place' (10). But where does this place a writer like Shani Mootoo, born in Ireland of Indo-Trinidadian parents, and raised in Trinidad before emigrating to Canada? Who are 'her' people and to what constituency should she address herself?

Leaving aside for the moment these questions of ascription, I am more interested in how such writers represent migration, cultural contact and interculturalisation. Several do articulate the negative side of doubleness that is the corollary of the migration-to-centre journey. Charlotte Sturgess notes the complicated allegiances of a 'doubly displaced' post-colonial writer like Brand (201). In her collection of prose poems, *No Language is Neutral*, Brand 'explores the contrasting sensations and experiences of Trinidad and Toronto, nostalgia and longing to return home balanced by the realisation that now no place is home' (Morrell 22). As in Cassin's novel, several stories in Brand's collection, *Sans Souci*, articulate the migrant's experience of being stereotyped, marginalised, alienated and rejected. Unlike Seacole's delicate allusions to the English racism, Brand depicts the actuality of the simmering, unarticulated rage felt by the outsiders:

To the escalator. She would be safe among the other passengers. Finally, she met the escalator, then 'Nigger whore!' a rough voice behind yelled hoarsely. She kept walking, slightly stumbling onto the clicking stairs. 'Whore! Nigger! Whore!' His voice sounded as if her was cleaning phlegm from the bottom of his throat. 'Nigger whore!' She placed herself among the others, climbing the escalator. They were silent. She, trying to hide, to be invisible ... she saw the crowd, some smiling at the obscene cough, others looking straight ahead. ('Train to Montreal' 27)

For Brand's female narrators, the sense of unbelonging and the inability to connect to or in the new city is reminiscent of Kincaid's *Lucy* and for both writers the strategy of overlaying Caribbean sounds, smells and tastes onto the northern present, conveys the peculiarly split consciousness of the unhomely migrant.

Like Lucy, Brand's protagonists experience the urban landscape of the centre as physically hostile and emotionally debilitating. As in the texts by Cassin and Kincaid, the migrant women counter it with hoarded memories of home, comparing the natural environment of the centre to the Caribbean home and assertively preferring the latter:

The city was claustrophobic. She felt land-locked. Particularly on humid days in the summer. She wanted to rush to the beach. But not the lake. It lay stagnant and saltless at the bottom of the city. She needed a place of water which led out, the vast ocean, salty and burning on the eyes. The feel of the salt, blue and moving water, rushing past her ears and jostling her body, cleaning it, coming up a different person every time she dove through a curling wave.... Suddenly every two years she felt like leaving, going to dive into the ocean just once. ('No Rinsed Blue Sky, No Red Flower Fences' 87)

The dysfunctional urban centre recurs in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*. Another Trinidadian/Canadian, Hopkinson's 'speculative fiction' imagines Toronto, 'at the moment of inner-city break-down, when the streets have been left to their remaining (sub-culture) inhabitants, while everyone who is able to has moved to the suburbs ... a futuristic scenario already being realised in the inner urban conditions of the present moment' (Bryce n.p.).

Living in between has its price. In an interview with Frank Birbalsingh, Brand somewhat bleakly situates herself permanently between her old and new worlds: 'I finally decided that I don't live there [Trinidad], and in some ways I don't live here [Toronto] either; so I live between here and there' (122). Not all women can deal with this unhomeliness. Cassin's Morea flees England to die in hiding; in the Canadian context, madness is another escape, as in Mordecai's poetic evocation of an elderly black woman on a Toronto subway ('Serafina' 87) It can silence the writer's voice by confining her within barren stereotypes, as wittily explored in Goodison's witty poem 'Lush':

Perhaps if you remain you will become civilised,  
detached, refined, your words pruned of lush.  
Lush is an indictment in this lean place

where all things thin are judged best.  
 What to do then with the bush and jungle  
 sprouting from your pen? (91)

On the other hand, consider Kincaid's admission in an interview (Birbalsingh): 'When you are in America, you can invent yourself' (139). In *Lucy* as in Seacole's *Adventures*, the migration journey can involve a creative component; can provide new sites for empowering self-constructions, the assumption of new — and multiple — subject positions. It is here in the new 'home' that Brand, too, rehearses other constructions of femininity. For Birbalsingh Brand's portrayal of diaspora women is 'new; it doesn't exist in previous West Indian writing: the kind of women who drink, socialise openly and are completely frank about their sexuality' (134). While Kincaid's *Lucy* is quite open about her heterosexual conquests, what Brand explores is an alternative sexuality: 'I felt the unordinary romance of women who love women for the first time' (1997 124). Perhaps the more cosmopolitan climate of the metropole, allows such frank erotic language to be spoken? Within vociferously homophobic Caribbean societies<sup>1</sup>, West Indian women writers have until recently tended to treat female sexuality with reticence and maintained a deafening silence on the issue of lesbianism. One can posit then that the encounter with the Canadian 'centre' both forces into being and enables awareness of the empowering potential of the multiple subject positions that Brand embraces as 'a Trinidadian Canadian black lesbian feminist' (Sturges 202).

While Brand focuses on the connections between women of 'African' descent, Shani Mootoo's collection of stories, *Out on Main Street*, deal with Indo-Caribbean women. Like the distinction in Cassin's text between English people and Caribbean creoles of English descent, one of Mootoo's themes is the cultural distance between Indians from the subcontinent and those who have been creolised in the West Indies. Several stories in this collection also highlight different attitudes to female sexuality in the West Indies and in Canada; compare for example, the title story and 'Lemon Scent'. In the latter (intensely erotic) story, two Trinidadian women pursue a passionate love affair under the jealous eye of Kamini's husband. Worried about his wife's depression, the husband solicits Anita's help, but Kamini's sensual preparations for Anita's visit alert his suspicions and he warns his wife: "You know, she might be one of those types who likes only women." ... With his lips almost against hers he whispers, "If I ever find out that you two have slept together I will kill you both" (28). Hence, even as they make love in a paradisaical tropical setting, Kamini 'always parts the branches and pensively looks over at the house' (29); trapped by fear of violence intrinsic to the heterosexual marriage she dare not leave, Kamini must publicly disguise and deny this part of her life.

By contrast, the lesbians of 'Out on Main Street', are very much 'out' in their Canadian context:

Yuh see, Janet pretty fuh so! And I doh like de way men does look at she, as if because she earring jeans and T-shirt and high-heel shoe and make-up and have long hair loose ... dat she easy.... Dat kind a thing always make me want to put mih arm around she waist like, she is my woman, take you eyes off she! (48)

Despite social wariness about transgressions of dominant codes of femininity, these women are constructed as unabashed about their sexuality, and to some extent this confidence comes from solidarity in the metropole with a community of lesbians who are instantly recognisable. Indeed, Mootoo highlights the deliberate cues given by these women to signify their difference: 'I recognised the shortness of hair, the breastlessness of shirt, the Birkenstocks and grey socks' which signal 'family' (113). Such recognition, in contrast to the West Indian silencing, prohibition and censure of alternative sexual preferences, is the main reason that a character gives for fleeing Trinidad — for choosing the migration journey:

she pack up and take off like a jet plane so she could live without people only shoo-shooing behind she back.... 'But A A! Yuh ain't hear de goods 'bout John Mahase daughter, gyurl? ... Everybody talking 'bout she. Hear dis, nah! Yuh ever see she wear a dress? Yes! Doh look at mih so. Yuh reading mih right!' (47)

I am suggesting then, that just as Seacole's and Kincaid's narratives explore the condition of exile in terms of new possibilities of fulfilment for women outside the restrictive gender and sexual roles ingrained in Caribbean mainstream and popular culture, so Canadian-Caribbean writers like Brand and Mootoo are able in their fictions to revel in unfixing sexual identities and so to find in the 'unhomely' a site of liberation.

Additionally, there is another kind of liberation at work here: the liberation of language and narrative from traditional forms and boundaries. The quotations from Mootoo suggest just a sample of the exciting experiments with ranges of speech style and the polyvocality that many critics have praised in the work of Caribbean-Canadian women writers. Nalo Hopkinson's work is an interesting example, in that it does not merely play with Caribbean language varieties, but casually breaks down all kinds of literary expectations and conventions. Her 'sci-fi' novels do not fit into any pre-existing patterns within the Caribbean literary tradition, although Hopkinson clearly signals her debt to oral and written Caribbean texts.<sup>2</sup>

In what amounts to a battle of good versus evil, the text refuses expectations of conventional religious references. The novel is set in a kind of post-apocalypse Toronto, with two centres of power: the balm-yard and Necropolis where Gros-Jeanne, the heroine's grandmother, performs her ceremonies of invocation of the spirits; and the CN Tower, where criminal drug lord Rudy rules by terror and draws power from sadistic rituals which are a sinister parody of the grandmother's. The setting is explicitly Canadian urban and recognisably contemporary, but the

spiritual belief system and iconography derive from the Caribbean. The landscape of the novel is the familiar Toronto space with all its landmarks, but the text undermines the 'real' — as in Kincaid's *Lucy* — by dispensing with fixed boundaries between living and dead, body and spirit. What Hopkinson is doing here, in her own way, is what writers like Selvon did in *The Lonely Londoners* and Kincaid does in *Lucy*: overlaying West Indian cultural markers onto the northern landscape, a kind of creolisation of the inhospitable new home.

It seems almost trite to observe that patterns offered in narratives of our past can suggest guidelines for our more 'global' future. Mary Seacole, Frieda Cassin and, more recently, Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo and Nalo Hopkinson have all grappled in their texts with responses to the 'unhomeliness' of the migrant condition, the marginalisation and stereotyping of the new arrivant, and the different types of distrust and rejection she encounters. In most cases, the writer discovers new life possibilities for Caribbean women within the centre. Their work addresses still crucial issues such as the inclusive/exclusive nature of constructions of West Indian identity and belonging, and demonstrates how varied are the literary responses to women's displacement and their desire to find a place of their own. Writers like Kincaid, Brand, Mootoo and Hopkinson offer new kinds of fiction and new ways of thinking about home and the unhomely. Belonging to the Caribbean in many ways, their exciting and increasingly sophisticated narratives also embrace India, England, the United States and Canada, and feature central characters who (continue to) refuse to be bound by borders.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, and Patricia Powell's *A Small Gathering of Bones*, provide chilling testimony. Significantly, both writers live and are published outside the West Indies.
- <sup>2</sup> The title of *Brown Girl in the Ring* comes from the refrain of a popular ring game, and the narrative blends traditional sayings ('When horse dead, cow get fat' 37), songs, call-and-response chant and popular mythology. Additionally, Hopkinson draws on Derek Walcott's play, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (itself built around a well-known folktale) for the plot of the third and youngest child challenging and triumphing over a devilish opponent.

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